Corbin described as a wild card

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Paul Corbin was an intelligent, aggressive, opportunistic political operative whose associates ranged from Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy to President John F. Kennedy to CIA Director William Casey, according to those who knew Corbin.

CORBIN

"Corbin was a totally uncontrolled missile and sort of an entertaining rogue," Arthur Schlesinger Jr. said in an interview with The Journal.

Schlesinger was an aide to John F. Kennedy and wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning book about the slain president. He also wrote a biography of Robert Kennedy, and now is a historian at City University of New York.

A January 1964 memo to former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover from Cartha De Loach, a top Hoover aide, described Corbin as "the former member of the Communist Party in Wisconsin who has quite a big mouth and throws his weight around considerably."

An article by Ken Bode in The New Republic, printed shortly after Corbin's death at 75 last year, said: "For more than 30 years, Corbin operated as the wild card of American politics, behind the scenes and at the margins.

"With his tailored suits, broad-brimmed fedoras, raspy voice and unparalleled nerve, Corbin was the Billy Martin of politics, not because he was a brawler, but because, like the spiky Martin, where Corbin went, havoc was sure to follow," wrote Bode, a former NBC political correspondent.

Corbin, who was born in Canada, immigrated to the United States in 1936 and settled in Janesville. For a time, he was a business partner in a flag-selling business with Wisconsin Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, the anti-communist crusader.

FBI records and Milwaukee Journal stories alleged that Corbin was active in the Communist Party of Wisconsin in the 1940s, something Corbin denied.

In 1960, Corbin worked in John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign and afterward was hired as a staff member at the Democratic National Committee, where he served as Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy's "ears and eyes," according to Bode's article.

Robert Kennedy became Corbin's godfather when Corbin converted to Catholicism.

President Lyndon Johnson forced Corbin out of the Democratic National Committee job in 1964 after Corbin worked in the New Hampshire primary to promote a movement to draft Robert Kennedy for vice president.

After Robert Kennedy was assassinated in 1968, Corbin became the curator of the Country Music Wax Museum in Nashville, Tenn. He later returned to Washington and worked as a political consultant.

Corbin's name last surfaced after the 1980 presidential election, when he was accused of delivering former President Jimmy Carter's debate briefing book to William Casey, the director of Ronald Reagan's campaign who was later named CIA director.

A 1984 House subcommittee that investigated the matter said testimony that Corbin had given the book to the Reagan campaign was credible, but not absolutely definite.

— Patrick Jasperse

Journal file photo

IN 1964, Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy (left) chats with US Rep. Clement J. Zablocki (second from right) and Wisconsin Gov. John Reynolds (third from right) at the Jefferson Hotel in Atlantic City. Reynolds later was appointed a federal judge and is now on senior status as a federal judge in the Eastern District of Wisconsin. Kennedy was assassinated in 1968 and Zablocki died in 1983.